

## CHAPTER 1: LAND USE

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Photo Compliments of: Leigh Sharps, Little Squam Lake, Ashland, NH

## 1.1 LAND USE INTRODUCTION

A purpose of the Land Use Chapter is to describe community vision statements in physical terms. Related specifically to land use, the Vision Statement for the town of Ashland includes stated desires to improve opportunities as an outdoor recreation destination and better the community's economic well-being by fostering low-impact business opportunities. The Recreation Chapter explores in greater detail, existing and proposed future recreational opportunities and the Economic Development Chapter documents trends, community assets, and details economic development opportunities. These and the other master plan chapters and input from Ashland residents through the *2009 Community Master Plan Survey* assist in outlining specific planning tools and potential regulatory changes that will aid Ashland in balancing future growth and development.

A common theme emerging from this Master Plan update process is the need to preserve the community characteristics that make Ashland an attractive place to live and visit. These characteristics will be described in detail in this chapter.

### 1.1.1 Community Survey Results

A. The results of the *2009 Community Master Plan Survey* identify several types of businesses that respondents indicated they would like to see developed in Ashland. The desired businesses identified by respondents included:

Medical Facilities	Dentist
Pharmacy	Bookstore
Clothing Store	Dry Cleaner
Bakery	

Each of these business types is permissible in the Ashland Zoning Ordinance. The availability of commercial space, off street parking, and the walkability in downtown are factors in business attraction. Currently commercial development opportunities are predominantly within existing buildings, with limited development opportunities on un-built parcels in the commercial zone. An effective tool for assessing commercial development potential would be to conduct a detailed inventory of unoccupied commercial space and undeveloped land in the commercial zone. This inventory, combined with an assessment of commercial needs such as water and sewer, parking based on trip generation, pedestrian connectivity to services, and off street parking would provide a better understanding of commercial development opportunities and limitations for the types of desired businesses identified in the *2009 Community Master Plan Survey*. While the *Ashland New Hampshire Comprehensive Master Plan 1984* proposed the expansion of the commercial zone to accommodate additional commercial development, in reality there is limited space for this to happen because the commercial zone as it exists is constrained by adjacent residential development that inhibits downtown commercial zone expansion.

Another factor related to future commercial development is the recent \$2.4 million community investment in municipal water and sewer that provides both of these services in the commercial and industrial zones. The final bond payments for this infrastructure expansion project will take place in the 2025 for the water project and 2030 for the sewer expansion project. This investment provides redevelopment opportunities for existing underutilized commercial and industrial buildings. With

the infrastructure in place that supports commercial and industrial development, likely future sewer expansion projects in the next decade are increased residential service, especially those residential neighborhoods in near Little Squam Lake, in an effort to improve and maintain water quality.

Proximity to Plymouth, which serves as a regional center for shopping, entertainment, and medical services, may limit the types of commercial development that will locate in Ashland. For example, pharmacies are typically found in close proximity to medical centers and larger healthcare facilities and clinics. These services currently exist in Plymouth and may only locate in Ashland given the right conditions. Currently there are efforts in Ashland to repurpose vacant mill buildings in the commercial and industrial zone. The use of Brownfield grants to assist with regional industrial site assessments and environmental hazard cleanup may be instrumental in moving redevelopment efforts forward. The mill buildings formerly owned by the L.W. Packard Company represent more than 70,000 square feet of gross building space, much of which is vacant today. These sizable buildings are zoned for commercial and industrial uses and could house a variety of uses including medical facilities that could attract complementary businesses such as pharmacies.

B. Land use related values identified in the *2009 Community Master Plan Survey* included: maintain the quaint Ashland town character, encourage tourism, improve landscaping, and create opportunities for walkable and bikeable access in-town. These values are related in many ways – a well landscaped, quaint village, with visible social activity on the streets is an attractive place for visitors. The efforts of the recently formed Downtown Revitalization Committee are supportive of maintaining the town's character and improving the downtown appearance. The Committee includes representation of Ashland business owners and municipal officials and is supportive of past recommendations identified in the *Ashland New Hampshire Comprehensive Master Plan 1984 – Chapter 6 Economic Development*. These recommendations include a detailed three-phased action plan for the downtown that addresses a host of town character improvements including promotional signage, opening and maintaining views to the river, creating an access road to adjacent mill sites to increase connectivity and redevelopment potential, and specific recommendations for signs, a pocket park, street furniture, increased parking, street lighting, building façade improvements, and a street tree program.

This inward focus on downtown improvements is consistent with Planning Board discussions about future land use. With limited opportunities for expansion of the downtown commercial zone, improvements to this vital community resource should be a primary focus of attention. Other current community initiatives supportive of downtown improvements include the work of the Downtown Revitalization Committee and the efforts of the Ashland Historical Society in creating a walking tour in downtown. The possibility of having Plan NH work on developing a design charrette in the downtown is being explored. A charrette is a visioning session the outcome of which is visual representations of potential design improvements. For Ashland a design challenge is the flow of traffic on Main Street. Traffic solutions that identify and integrate pedestrian connectivity and opportunities for streetscape improvements serve as potential opportunities to advance recommendations in the downtown improvement plan.

Many of the recommendations identified in the downtown improvement plan involve issues and programs beyond the reach of the planning board's application review process and local regulations and ordinances. The recommendations that can be directly influenced by the Planning Board include signage, lighting, building design, and landscaping. Generally, each of these topics represents components typically addressed in community design guidelines. While each of these topics is

referenced in the town's site plan review regulations and/or the town's zoning ordinance individually, all may benefit from review and further refinement. The development of comprehensive design guidelines is recommended as an effective tool for coordinating incremental future development and redevelopment with the existing character of the community.

C. A third land use related aspect of the *2009 Community Master Plan Survey* was the identification of undesirable business types. Survey respondents indicated that more gasoline fueling stations, additional fast food restaurants, and large chain stores are viewed as being undesirable. A leading potential concern presented by these three types of businesses is high vehicle trip generation. Other potential concerns associated with large chain stores are: significant parking requirements, building aesthetics, and proximity to village centers. Often village centers do not have parcels of significant size to accommodate large chain stores. As a result, when these stores are permitted by zoning they locate on parcels in areas outside of village centers. In Ashland, future commercial development of these business types in the area of I-93, may distract from the desired compact village center and promotion of tourist attracting, low impact businesses. A common occurrence at interstate interchanges is for several gasoline fueling stations to be located for the convenience of the traveling public. Careful land use planning in the area of I-93, which serves as a gateway to downtown Ashland, through the promotion of services and business that complement village businesses is highly desirable.

### 1.1.2 Recent Trends

Ashland has not experienced the pressures associated with population growth that similar sized Lakes Region communities have in the past several decades. As displayed in Figure 1.1, in comparison to Andover, Holderness, New Hampton, and Tamworth the 1980 Ashland population was the highest of the group. Between 1980 and the 2010 NH Office of Energy and Planning population projections, it is estimated that Ashland grew by approximately 15 percent with the smallest population rate of increase experienced between 1990 to 2000 (2 percent). In contrast, the population in Holderness was projected to be the same as Ashland in 2010, with a growth rate more than double that of Ashland (31 percent) from 1980 to 2010.

**Figure 1.1:** Comparison of Population Growth in Like Sized Lakes Region Communities 1980-2010

	1980	1990	2000	2010	Percent Change 1980 - 1990	Percent Change 1990 - 2000	Percent Change 2000 - 2010	Percent Change 1980 - 2010
Andover	1,587	1,883	2,109	2,320	19%	12%	10%	46%
Ashland	1,807	1,915	1,955	2,080	6%	2%	6%	15%
Holderness	1,586	1,694	1,930	2,080	7%	14%	8%	31%
New Hampton	1,249	1,606	1,950	2,330	29%	21%	19%	87%
Tamworth	1,672	2,165	2,510	2,730	29%	16%	9%	63%

Source: US Census 1980 - 2000; NHOEP 2010 Population Projections

The residential development pressures associated with population growth has been highly variable in the comparison communities from 2000 to 2009. A 2009 housing stock was estimated using total housing units from the 2000 US Census and residential permitting activity in subsequent years from *Current Estimates and Trends in New Hampshire's Housing Supply* prepared annually by the NH Office of

Energy and Planning. Figure 1.2 indicates changes in total housing stock, overall percent change, and unit increases by housing type. For example, in 2000 the number of single family housing units was 534 according to the US Census; the total estimated single family units in Ashland in 2009 was 607 based on residential permitting data. It is estimated that the Ashland housing stock grew by 11.7 percent between the years 2000 and 2009.

A significant difference between Ashland and the comparison communities is the composition of the housing stock. The multi-family housing stock in Ashland is disproportionately high compared to the four other communities. As depicted in Figure 1.3, multi-family units represent 44 percent of the Ashland housing stock with the next highest percentage of multi-family housing in Tamworth (11 percent). In fact, the total estimated multi-family units in Ashland (567) far exceed the combined number of multi-family units in the comparison communities (437). This is a defining characteristic for Ashland.

**Figure 1.2:** Housing Stock for Selected Lakes Region 2000-2009

	Andover		Ashland		Holderness		New Hampton		Tamworth	
	2000	2009	2000	2009	2000	2009	2000	2009	2000	2009
Single Family	871	977	534	607	1,004	1,105	810	968	1,319	1,431
Multi-Family	75	78	522	567	104	99	54	64	161	196
Manufactured	92	89	93	110	100	106	79	82	182	189
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,038</b>	<b>1,144</b>	<b>1,149</b>	<b>1,284</b>	<b>1,208</b>	<b>1,310</b>	<b>943</b>	<b>1,114</b>	<b>1,662</b>	<b>1,816</b>
Percent Change 2000 - 2009	10.2%		11.7%		8.4%		18.1%		9.3%	

Source: NHOEP Current Estimates and Trends in New Hampshire's Housing Supply, 2011

**Figure 1.3:** Housing Types as a Percentage of Estimated Total Housing Stock 2009

	Andover	Ashland	Holderness	New Hampton	Tamworth
Single Family	85%	47%	84%	87%	79%
Multi-Family	7%	44%	8%	6%	11%
Manufactured	8%	9%	8%	7%	10%

Commercial and industrial development activity in Ashland between 1999 to 2008 led to the issuance of 44 commercial permits and a net loss of one industrial unit; with two units permitted in 2007 and three units demolished in 2005-2006. A considerable portion of the commercial activity took place in 2006 when 26 commercial permits were issued.

Land use in Ashland is guided by the four zones and two overlay districts. Each of the zones provides unique guidelines for the types of development that is permitted based on desired land use patterns and purposes the zones are designed to accomplish. The Ashland Zoning Map (Figure 1.4) and the following descriptions provide more detail about the zones and their locations.

Commercial Zone (C): The purpose of this zone is primarily for retail and services related to shopping, banking, and offices. The Commercial zone is comprised of 82.4 acres or approximately 1 percent of the total land area in Ashland.

Figure 1.4: Ashland Zoning Map

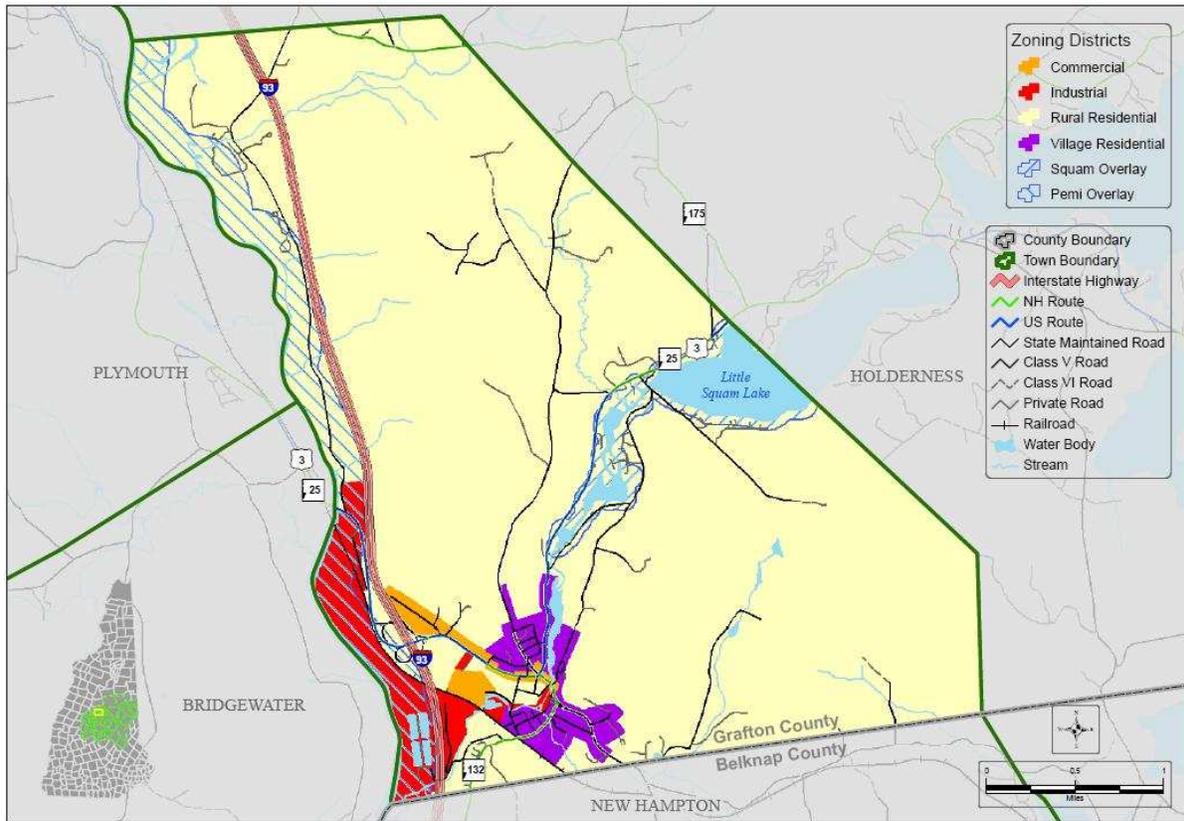


Figure 1.5: Commercial Zone and Industrial-Commercial Zone Permitted Uses

Industrial-Commercial (IC): The purpose of this zone is to encourage the establishment of industrial and commercial uses that are not detrimental to the community or environment. Many of the same uses permitted in the commercial zone are allowed in Industrial-Commercial zone. A noteworthy difference is the exclusion of residential development. The Industrial-Commercial zone is comprised of 279.2 acres or

Permitted Uses / Zone	C	IC
Lodging facilities, hotels, motels, and restaurants	✓	
Residential units including apartments	✓	
Personal storage units	✓	
Wholesale and retail stores and shops	✓	✓
Offices, banks, personal services	✓	✓
Auto service stations and garages	✓	✓
Theaters, halls, and clubs	✓	✓
Accessory uses	✓	✓
Communication towers	✓	✓
Manufacturing, packing, processing, and warehousing		✓
Research and/or testing facilities		✓
Railroad and trucking uses, offices and printing facilities		✓
Storage yards		✓

approximately 4 percent of the total land area in Ashland. Figure 1.5 highlights the differences in permitted uses between the Commercial and Industrial-Commercial zones.

Village Residential (VR): Provides for residential neighborhoods in close proximity to commercial areas, schools, and municipal services. The availability of municipal water and sewer allows for greater residential density. The Village Residential zone is comprised of 196.6 acres or approximately 3 percent of the total land area in Ashland.

Rural Residential (RR): This zone provides opportunities for low to medium density residential development and open space. Most of the large tracts of conservation land in Ashland are located in this zone, which also promotes the protection of environmentally sensitive resources such as: steep slopes, floodplains, wetlands, and poorly drained soils. Comprised of 6,633 acres or approximately 92 percent of the total land area in Ashland, the Rural Residential zone is the largest zone.

Figure 1.6 highlights the differences in permitted uses between the Village Residential and Rural Residential zones.

**Figure 1.6:** Village Residential and Rural Residential Zone Permitted Uses

Permitted Uses / Zone	VR	RR
Single and two-family dwellings	✓	✓
Multi-family dwellings	✓	✓*
Home occupations	✓	✓
Accessory uses	✓	✓
Cluster residential developments		✓
Manufactured housing		✓
Agriculture, forestry, and farming		✓

\* 6 units per structure in the RR zone.

Overlay Districts: The town of Ashland has two overlay districts designed to protect environmentally sensitive water resources which include the Pemigewasset River corridor and the Little Squam Lake and Squam River shorelines. The overlay districts provide additional development constraints designed to protect water quality. The districts include land within 500 feet of the Pemigewasset River and 250 feet of the Little Squam Lake and Squam River shorelines.

Figure 1.7 highlights the differences in prohibited uses between the Pemigewasset and Little Squam Lake and Squam River overlay districts.

**Figure 1.7:** Overlay District Prohibited Uses

Prohibited Uses / Overlay District	Pemigewasset	Little Squam Lake and Squam River
Manufactured housing parks	×	
Structures on slopes >15 percent	×	×
Earth excavations	×	×
Application of fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides		×
Underground fuel storage tanks		×

The Lakes Region Planning Commission analyzed 12 categories of land use and land cover to describe the status of land development in Ashland in 2011. A preliminary assessment was conducted using 2006 aerial photography. Ashland Planning Board members provided local land use knowledge to refine the photo interpretations. The outcome of the analysis is illustrated in Figure 1.8 and the Ashland Existing Land Use Map (Figure 1.9 at the end of this chapter). The distinction between land use and land cover is used to describe land that is actively being used versus undeveloped areas. Land use (how the land is physically being used) includes typical land use categories such as residential, commercial, and industrial development and additional land uses including: transportation, recreational, agricultural, and abandoned land uses such as gravel pits that are no longer active. Land cover describes what occupies undeveloped areas. This classification includes water, wetlands, forest, cleared land, and transitional areas. Some overlaps exist in land use and land cover. For example, a five acre residential property may be mostly wooded with some lawn space and the residence. For the purposes of the analysis, the house and lawn area are considered residential use while the remaining lot area is classified as forested land cover. The town boundaries encompass a total of 7,192.9 acres of land and approximately 344.1 acres of water. The vast majority of the town is forested (74.8 percent).

**Figure 1.8:** Ashland Existing Land Use and Land Cover

Land Use Classification	Acres	Percent of Land Area
Residential	661.6	9.2%
Commercial/Institutional	78.2	1.1%
Industrial	18.6	0.3%
Transportation/Communication/Utilities	375.1	5.2%
Outdoor Recreation/Cemeteries	234.0	3.3%
Vacant/Abandoned	10.8	0.2%
Agricultural	157.1	2.2%
Transitional	186.7	2.6%
Forest	5,381.5	74.8%
Cleared/Other Land	24.0	0.3%
Wetlands	65.2	0.9%
Water*	344.1	0.0%
<b>Total Land and Water</b>	<b>7,536.9</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Total Land Area</b>	<b>7,192.8</b>	<b>100%</b>

\* Surface waters represent 4.6 percent of the total area encompassed within Ashland town boundaries.

### 1.3 FUTURE LAND USE

The town's primary future land use focus is on infill development that utilizes existing buildings and developable land for industrial and commercial uses. An assessment of available space, land, and opportunities to relocate existing uses would be beneficial in determining development potential. A

use relocation that was discussed by the Planning Board is the downtown ball field. This land currently serves an important recreational and social function and has pedestrian accessibility, but a higher future commercial function may be served that better utilizes the available municipal water and sewer services. While much more discussion would have to take place about the practicality of relocating the ball field (is the owner willing to sell, is equally accessible land available to relocate to, costs and benefits of relocation, etc.) the idea exemplifies the type of planning associated with infill development efforts – because something exists in a location today, does not mean that it is the most suitable future use. This is especially true in areas such as the Ashland Commercial Zone where expansion possibilities are constrained.

Ashland's secondary focus is the potential expansion of the Village Residential zone. This would provide additional opportunities for compact residential development in close proximity to the commercial services. While this would not lead to additional commercial development opportunities, home occupations are permitted in the Village Residential Zone.

Additional considerations for future land use are identified in the Ashland Future Land Use Map as areas labeled "Future Development Potential" (see Figure 1.10 at the end of this chapter). These areas represent currently undeveloped acres where development has been contemplated or areas that may be appropriate for certain types of development. For example, the area Figure 1.10 in north Ashland, adjacent to Interstate 93 may be well suited for commercial development. Where differences exist between current zoning and appropriate development types, careful consideration of changes to the zoning ordinance is required.

#### 1.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

**Viewshed Analysis:** Ashland has an abundance of unique cultural, natural, and historic resources. How these resources are viewed from different vantage points is of great importance to the look and feel of the community. A viewshed analysis documents, maps, prioritizes, and protects important areas that are visible from specific locations. This analysis can be conducted for a specific feature or include views throughout the town. A good starting point for Ashland might be the identification of potential views from downtown to the river. In this instance vegetation that currently obscures river views from desired vantage points in the village would be identified and assessed for clearing and long-term maintenance. The Lakes Region Planning commission has worked with communities to develop local viewshed analyses.

**Commercial Space Assessment:** Given the space and potential for new businesses to locate in the village center, a proactive approach to attracting businesses might include an inventory of commercial space, vacant land, and associated amenities. This exercise would be useful for an ongoing dialog about future land use. A primary question to be explored is "will the availability of existing commercial and industrial development opportunities satisfy Ashland's future development goals?" It was suggested in the *Ashland New Hampshire Comprehensive Master Plan 1984* that commercial land use should be increased by 13 acres using a population to commercial acreage ratio. Would the application of this ratio produce a similar result today?

**Build-out Analysis:** The purpose of a build-out analysis is to show a locality what land is available for development, how much development can occur and at what densities, and what consequences

may result when complete build-out of available land occurs according to the zoning ordinance. A build-out analysis can reflect changes in the zoning ordinance to illustrate the effects of those changes on future resources. A build-out analysis can also help quantify the costs of growth.

**Off-street Parking Needs Assessment:** Limited space for off-street parking exists in the downtown. This issue has been explored in the past and could be a significant limitation for commercial development. Past identified solutions may no longer be viable today. These solutions should be explored and assessed with a commitment to determining current needs and opportunities. The Planning Board considers this to be the leading impediment to downtown development.

**Design Standards:** Design guidelines or design standards vary greatly in the type and breadth of topics covered. Common elements include: landscaping, parking, signs, and the appearance of buildings – façade, scale, height, roof style, etc. The purpose of design guidelines is to convey the type of commercial and multi-family development a community desires which is consistent with the characteristics that make the community an attractive place. While subjectivity and judgment are invariably part of making decisions about aesthetics, there are universal principles of good design. Once established design guidelines can reduce time and cost of design changes when incorporated early in the planning process and are intended to work towards a common vision for the town.

Well crafted design guidelines can promote building design that is functional, economical, attractive, and harmonious. This balances the benefits to all residents with the individual rights of a property owner to do what they wish with their land. Consistent with *2009 Community Master Plan Survey* responses, design guidelines can be an important and useful tool for Ashland. The goal in the creation and use of this planning tool is a direct link between the guideline contents and the community vision articulated in this master plan.

**Brownfield Grants:** A regional effort is ongoing to identify, assess, and take remedial actions to cleanup and repurpose underutilized former industrial sites. The town should stay active in this effort and support the efforts of identified brownfield site owners.

**Downtown Improvement Plan:** The previously prepared *Ashland Downtown Improvement Plan* contains a wealth of suggestions that are relevant for Ashland today. This plan should be revisited and recommendations prioritized and an implementation strategy and timeline identified. Information to be reviewed is in the document titled *Ashland Downtown Improvement Plan: Comprehensive Master Plan Town of Ashland, NH Chapter VIII 1982-1983* is found on pages 8-41 to 8-49.

**Plan NH Charrette:** Apply for a Plan NH grant to perform a traffic design charrette in downtown Ashland.





Figure 1.10: Future Land Use Map

